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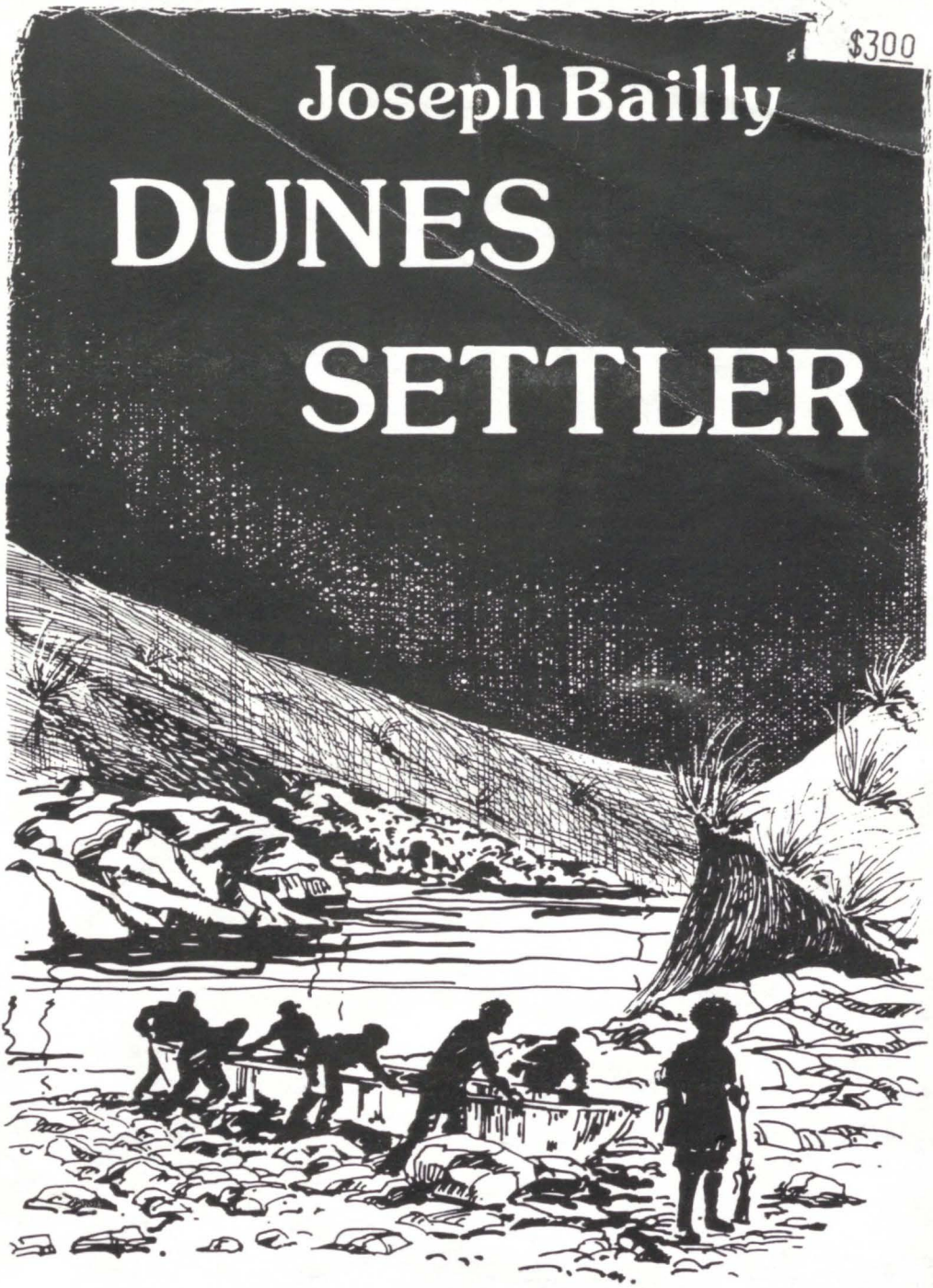
Joseph Bailly

DUNES SETTLER



by Martha Miller

JOSEPH BAILLY, DUNES SETTLER

By

Martha Miller

Illustrated by Joyce Keane

Dedicated to the Children

of Bailly School

Chesterton, Indiana

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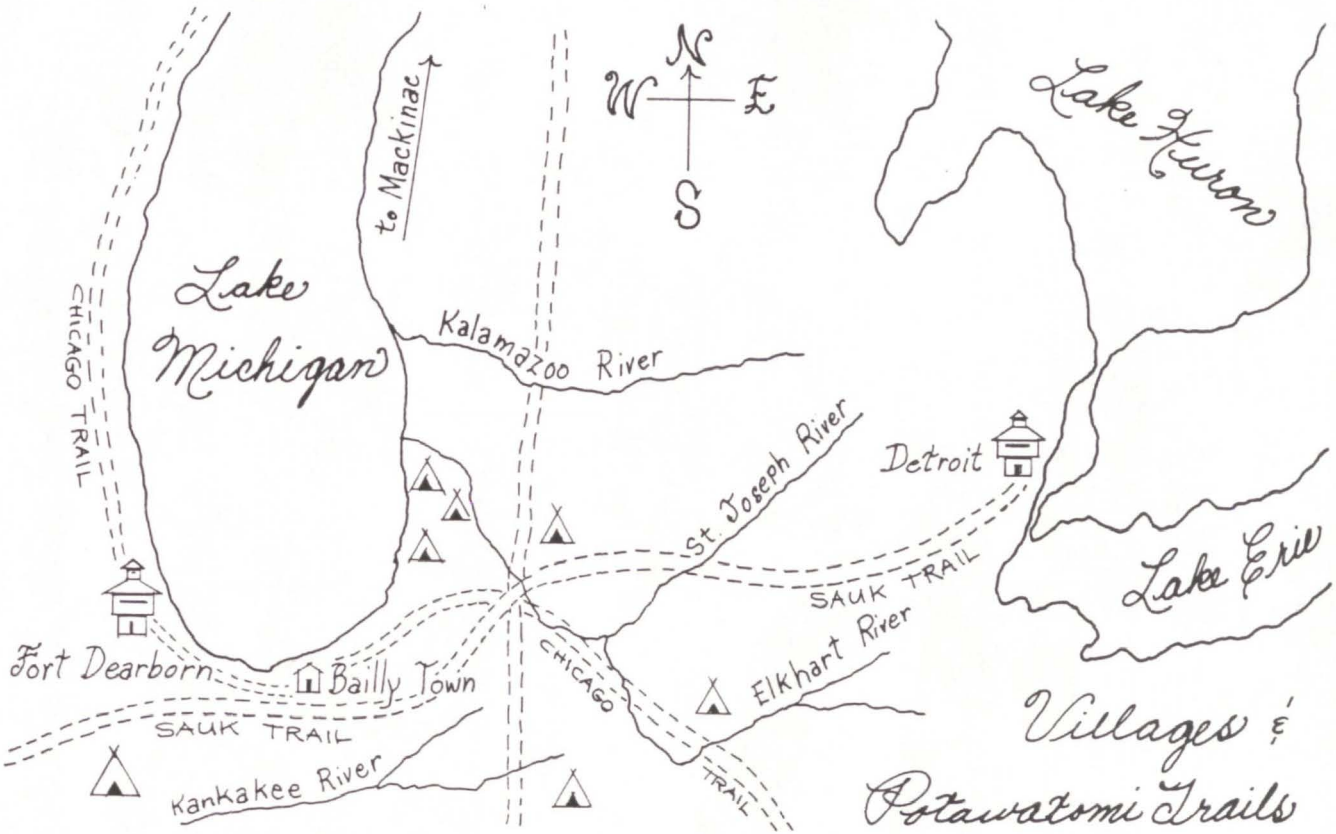


Villages & Potawatomi Trails

JOSEPH BAILLY, DUNES SETTLER

The Early Years

Joseph Bailly de Messein was born in 1774, in Quebec, Canada. As the son of a French nobleman, he was well educated, liked to read and owned many books. He wore the fine clothes of a gentleman and rode fast, sleek ponies. His loud, happy laugh and his friendly personality helped him to gain many friends. Wherever he lived, his friends visited him often; he liked to give parties.

As a young man, Joseph Bailly spent a winter in the forests of Canada trapping and selling furs. Liking this rugged kind of work, he decided to become a fur trader instead of a French nobleman in Quebec.

His office was in Mackinac, a small village on the northern shore of Lake Michigan. This was the main area of the great fur business. Indians brought their furs to Mackinac to trade for goods they needed. The fur traders sold the furs to be made into coats, hats and capes. Many of the furs were sent to England and France to be worn by the rich people there.

His business with the Indians at Mackinac was good, but Joseph Bailly wanted adventure. With a crew of six men, he traveled to villages in the forests to obtain more furs. They took care of sorting and packing the furs. The canoe was loaded with items for trading: axes, knives, kettles, guns, ammunition, blankets, calico for dresses, trinkets and rum.

Joseph Bailly liked the Indians. He understood them. He traded fairly treating them like brothers, rather than as a white father or boss as other traders did. He wore trapper's clothes similar to Indian clothes, buckskins and leather boots. He learned their language and way of life. He trusted the Indians; they trusted him.

He built several trading posts along rivers in Michigan. His posts had buildings for storing furs and for keeping the trading goods. His crews of men, called voyageurs, lived at the posts.

The Indians went on a hunt every fall, going deep into the forest for several months. In the spring they brought bundles of furs to the trading posts. The furs were sorted by the voyageurs and stored until they were ready to be shipped to the main office in Mackinac. This trip was made in the summer when the lake was calm for traveling.

Joseph Bailly traveled from post to post many months of each year to keep his business in order. He spent a lot of time with his Indian friends during these visits.

He married the daughter of an Indian chief as was the custom of many fur traders. He probably paid for her with horses and other things her father asked for. Her name was Metlakatla.

Joseph Bailly and his wife had six children, five sons and a daughter. When the children were old enough for school, Joseph decided they should go

to Montreal, Canada. They would get a good education there, so he loaded them in the large canoe and started the long journey. Soon after the canoe left shore, the youngest boy, Francis, jumped overboard and swam back to the beach. He said he did not want to be educated; he was going to be a medicine man. The other children went on to school.

Joseph Bailly was a Christian and a devout Catholic. He was unhappy that his Indian wife worshipped the "Spirit of Darkness." He tried to persuade Metlakatla to become a Christian, but she refused. Finally, they ended this marriage, and he moved back to Mackinac. He lived there and continued to travel around to his trading posts.

Several years later, a friend told Joseph some Ottawa squaws were coming into the harbor to trade their baskets and bead work. One of the squaws was a beautiful Indian girl with black eyes, pale waxen skin, and long, thick, black shining hair. The friend wanted Joseph to see her. Joseph wasn't interested, but he finally agreed and went down to the beach to see the maiden. She was

Marie Le Fevre

the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. He helped her out of her canoe, asked her name, then asked her to marry him. That night he called his servants and friends into the living room of his house, and he and Marie LeFevre were married.

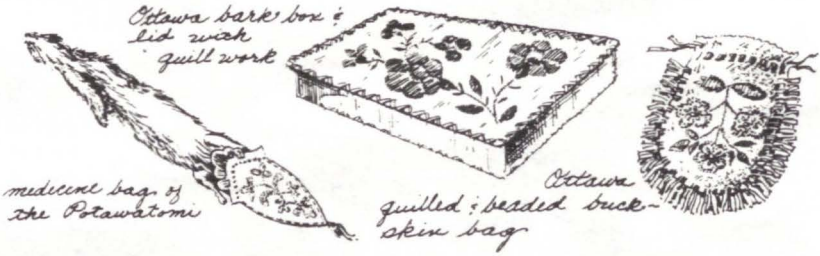
Marie LeFevre

Marie LeFevre was the child of a white French fur trader. Her mother was an Ottawa Indian. Marie had been raised as a white child living in a fine house and wearing white children's clothes. She had been ten when her father died. Soon after his death, relatives of his had come from France to take over his house and his fur business. Marie, her mother, and her sister had been put out of their house and were given nothing. The only place they could go was back to her mother's Ottawa village.

This new life was hard. Living in an Indian village was completely different from the life in a civilized town. What bothered Marie most was the Indian's strange religion. She had been brought up a Christian; these Indians worshipped the "Great Serpent," the snake god. Her mother turned back to this religion, but Marie kept her Catholic faith.

When she was very young, Marie married a medicine man who worshipped the snake god. He used many strange herbs, he did magic tricks, and he worked with electricity to hypnotize the Indians. He needed Marie to help him with his magic. She was so against this kind of witchcraft, she found it impossible to work with him. When he spent a summer away on a trip collecting herbs and learning new tricks, she worked very hard weaving mats, tending a garden and making clay pots to buy her freedom from him. This was the custom of the Ottawas; it was their form of divorce.

After her divorce, Marie made moccasins and did bead work to sell to the people at Mackinac. This was how she supported herself and her two little children while she continued to live with her mother in the Ottawa village.



It has been said that Marie had always dreamed of marrying a Frenchman like her father. When Joseph Bailly asked her to marry him, her dream came true.

Joseph, Marie and her children Agatha and Theresa lived happily for four years in Mackinac and at one of his trading posts. Joseph Bailly became a rich and respected man. He started new trading posts, two in Indiana and one in Missouri. He traveled constantly to his posts and to Detroit and Canada on business.

The Troubled Years

Then, times began to change. During the War of 1812, Mackinac became a battleground between the English and the Americans. Joseph Bailly was an English citizen from Canada, so when the Americans controlled Mackinac, he was not treated kindly. He had problems with the Indians, too. Some of them were fighting on the side of the British in hopes they could get their land back from the Americans. They had no time to trap furs. Those who did trap were selling their furs to strangers. One large fur company was squeezing out the independent traders. Joseph and Marie thought they should move to a place where there was less trouble, where the forests and rivers were still wild enough for them to get furs, and where the Indians were friendly.

Joseph had been through the dunes several times. He thought the beauty of that country was unsurpassed. The stately maple trees, the oak forests. the tall white sand dunes, the little rivers, and beautiful Lake Michigan were as lovely as any place he had ever seen. There would be many furs there.

The area he was interested in was a day's journey to Fort Dearborn, an American military fort where he had many friends. Detroit was a week's journey away. The lake was close by; he could ship furs to Mackinac. The Indians were friendly Potowatomies. The Ottawas spent winters and part of the summers in the dunes. He thought this would be a fine place to settle.

Marie went with him on one trip to look over the land. They left the children at the Ottawa village with her mother and traveled by horseback down the Michigan coast. With them was Jean Baptiste Clotier, Joseph's friend and valet.

They were ambushed in the forest by American cavalry troops. Joseph Bailly was arrested and charged with spying for the British and for being a traitor to the Americans. He insisted this was not true. He had made his living on American soil for years. Many of his good friends were Americans. But, he was a British citizen, and America was at war with Britain.

The soldiers took him to Detroit and put him in an American prison. He remained there for several months, probably was treated poorly and given little food so when the war of 1812 ended and he was released, he was a physical wreck and a shadow of his former self. He was never able to regain his full strength after this long ordeal. While he was in prison he made a solemn vow that if he was ever given his freedom, he would become a missionary and work among the Indians, converting them into Christians. This would be his way of giving thanks for his freedom.

When Joseph Bailly was arrested and taken to prison, Marie was left behind. She sat alone under a tree in the dense forest crying. She didn't know where to go or how to get back to her village. The soldiers said they would come back and find her. She was very

frightened; she didn't know what to do. She wondered what would become of her and what would happen to her husband. Suddenly, she heard a rustling in the tall grass nearby. It was Jean Baptiste Clotier who had slipped from his horse when the soldiers started to lead Joseph away. He had hidden in the forest until he thought they were gone and it was safe to come to Marie. He told her not to be afraid; he would lead her safely back home.

He hurried to a nearby Potowatomi village to buy Indian clothes and food. He knew they would be safer in the forest if they looked like Indians, rather than white people in traveling clothes. He darkened their skin with walnut hull juice and put war paint on their faces so their disguise would be complete. He had to put the war paint on Marie's face several times because her tears kept washing it off.

Then they began their long journey. They traveled west rather than east, then north along the lake shore to be sure they kept out of sight of the troops. It was December and bitter cold with deep snow. Marie had a badly sprained ankle which made walking difficult. Often they went for days without food or shelter. Sometimes they traveled at night so they would not be seen by unfriendly Indians who would treat Marie unkindly. Sometimes Jean Baptiste crept into Indian villages in search of food while Marie hid in the forest. Some villages were friendly, but Marie could not stand the unusual religious rites; she would rather stay alone in the forest.

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After many weeks of hardship and suffering, they came to a friendly Menominee village where they were safe. Marie rested there while Jean Baptiste went by snowshoe over the ice of Lake Michigan to their home in Mackinac.

Marie

While she was staying at the Menominee village, Marie made a vow that if she were saved from this perilous trip, she would devote her life to her family and to missionary work. She would never wear white people's clothes again: she would dress herself in missionary's plain dresses. This would be her way of giving thanks for being saved.

When spring came, Jean Baptiste arrived back with a large canoe. He took Marie to Mackinac, then to the Ottawa village where she waited for news of her husband.

At this time she had a baby. It was a boy. The baby died a few hours after it was born. It was placed in a birch bark casket and buried under a tree in the forest.

The Indian nurses realized that Marie was very sick from her terrible journey. How could they tell her that her baby was dead? Then they had an idea. In the next teepee was a mother who could not care for her baby. They took this child and put it into Marie's arms. Marie did not know for fifteen years that this little girl was not her child. Even though it had dark Indian skin, black eyes and thick, coarse hair unlike hers or Joseph's, she had no reason to doubt that it was her child. The Indian child, Hortense, was to be the cause of great trouble in the Bailly household for many years.

After the war of 1812, Joseph Bailly was released from prison. He was given papers saying he was not a spy or traitor. He rejoined his wife and family and went back to his business. At first he was prosperous, but he was not strong and healthy as he once was. Travel to his distant trading posts was hard for him. Then, too, the American government assigned certain areas where traders could work. That meant he had to give up many of his posts. He decided to become an American citizen and go to the Indiana Dunes. He and Marie made several trips to the dunes to select their homesite. They were anxious to move to this peaceful spot and to fulfill their vows as missionaries among the Indians.

Indiana

They chose a site on the north bank of the Little Calumet River, one-half mile north of the Indiana Boundary Line road. For five years they thought they were in Michigan because they thought the road was the dividing line between Michigan and Indiana. However, the road was not the dividing line; Indiana went all the way to the lake. But they were happy where they were; they did not want to move again.

Their homesite was excellent. The river was useful to transport furs to the lake. If it was unnavigable, the furs were put on packhorses for the short trip over the dunes. At the lake they were loaded onto barges for the trip to Mackinac.

After their first house was finished, Joseph went away on a trip. When he

returned several weeks later, he was surprised to find the house had been moved to the other side of the river. One night a bad storm had awakened Marie. As she put her hand out beside the bed, it dipped into water. She realized at once the river had overflowed its banks; the water was three or four feet deep in her bedroom. Calling the servants to bring a boat, she awakened the children and they rowed across the river to a high bank. They made a tent of quilts and blankets and stayed there for the night. The next day they rowed back to the house for more blankets and cooking utensils. Later, when the water subsided, they took the house apart board by board and rebuilt it up on a high hill above the Calumet River.[1]

The homestead, which was a permanent house, was built plantation style, the house in front, with several buildings in back. These buildings were for servants' living quarters, a cookhouse, an office and a warehouse. There were six to eight cabins in all.

[1]Frances R. Howe, The Story of a French Homestead (Columbus, Nitschke Brothers, 1907), pp. 42-43.

The homestead was not like log cabins of early settlers. Two and a half stories high, it was made of cut lumber rather than logs. The boards were fastened together with wooden pegs. Overlapping weather boards covered the outside. The inside had plastered walls.[2]

One fall day, Joseph Bailly was sitting in his office when a Potowatomi Indian chief came to visit him. The chief said the homestead was on Indian land where Indians had camped and lived for hundreds of years. Their village was at Fort Creek at Waverly Beach. They camped near Mount Tom every year. The Bailly house had been built on their sacred ground.

Joseph showed the chief his permit from the United States Government saying he could live on this land. But Joseph was willing to pay the chief for it. The chief could not read the document, but he realized white settlers were moving west and the Indians would soon have to give up all their land. He said he was glad it was Joseph Bailly and not some other white man who had settled there.

[2] Ibid. p. 121.

Joseph Bailly became a good friend of the Potowatomis. He built a little cabin for them near his office. They used this cabin to store their valuables when they went away on a hunt. He was a friend of his wife's tribe, the Ottawas, too. They came down to the dunes in the winter to hunt deer. In the spring, the squaws came down to make maple sugar in the maple groves. In the summer, the medicine men came to collect herbs, medicines and poisonous plants for their ceremonies. The dunes grew hundreds of rare plants which were useful to medicine men.

Indians came to this homestead whenever they were in the dunes. They told Joseph the history of their tribes and how they communicated with other tribes. They taught him their snake dances and religious rites. They showed him how to make mats and blankets.

The Bailly children played with the Indians. They spoke the language and were free to go to the Indian camps. The Indian children called Marie, "Aunt Marie." They enjoyed listening to her stories for she was a good storyteller. She helped the Indians with family problems: she probably did missionary work among the women.

For ten or twelve years Joseph Bailly and his family were the only white settlers in the dunes.

But they were not isolated as other settlers were. The Bailly trading post was near several Indian trails. The Detroit road along the beach had been

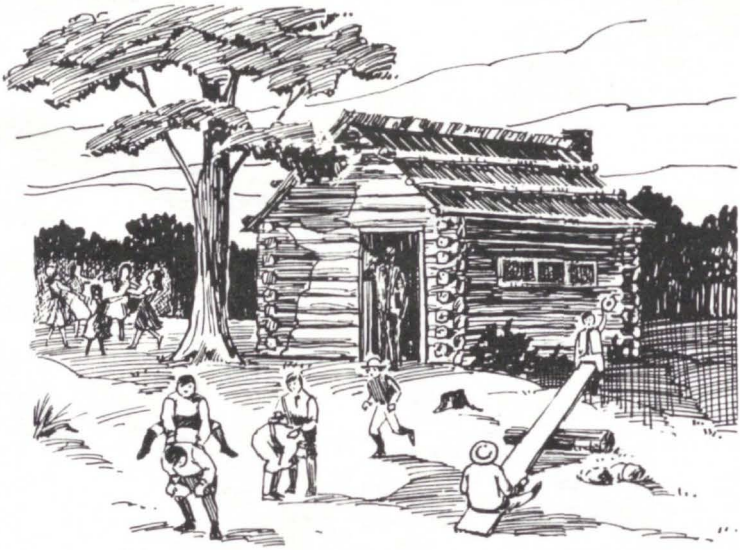
an Indian trail for hundreds of years. Another trail went south of the trading post. The trail along the Calumet River went through their front yard. Often he and his family would sit on the front porch and watch great parades of Indians going by in their beautiful war bonnets and bright clothes. They were going to Detroit to get their yearly payment for the land they had sold to the government. Sometimes they traveled to meet with other Indian tribes.

White people traveling on the Detroit/ Fort Dearborn road stopped at the Bailly Homestead for food and rest. This was the only stopping place between Fort Dearborn and Fort Wayne. Missionaries were especially welcomed. Religious services were held in the dining room and in the parlor. The Potowatomis were not interested in this religion, but if the Ottawas were in the region, they gladly came to hear the missionaries. Often the house was so full of worshippers some people had to stand outside on the porch.

The Ottawas were in awe of their medicine men who did all kinds of magic tricks and cast spells over them. Joseph told them of Benjamin Franklin's experiments in electricity and showed them how the medicine men made tricks with it. He taught them how to do the juggling acts the medicine men used. When the Indians learned how they had been tricked, many of them were converted to Christianity. This is how he fulfilled his vow to be a missionary.

Joseph Bailly educated his four children and Marie's two girls, teaching them in the evening by the fireside. He read to them from one of the many books in his library. Often the women did their needlework as they listened. Sometimes he invited the Indian and French servants in to hear lectures on geography, history, or religion.

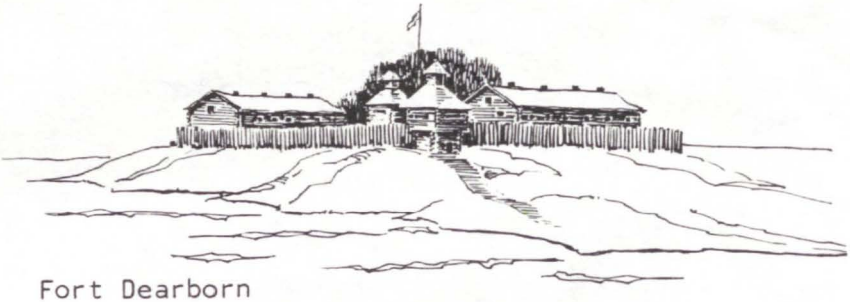
He taught his girls to ride horseback. He was a strict teacher; he made sure they rode correctly with good form. All his children were good riders.



When the children were older, Joseph sent them to the Cary Mission School in Fort Wayne and, when the school moved, to Niles, Michigan. This missionary school was established to convert and

educate Indians. The Bailly children attended because it was the closest school to their home, and the McCoys, who ran the school, were white. The McCoy children attended the school, too. The Bailly children learned English there. The lessons were taught from the Webster's Spelling Book. When the children could read, they read from the Bible. The boys had lessons in agriculture and mechanics; the girls learned needlework.

The Bailly children lived at the Cary Mission and came home during vacations. Joseph Bailly's son Robert died there of typhoid fever. Joseph was so upset at his son's death, he stayed home the next winter and translated the Bible into Ottawa language to be read to the Indians.



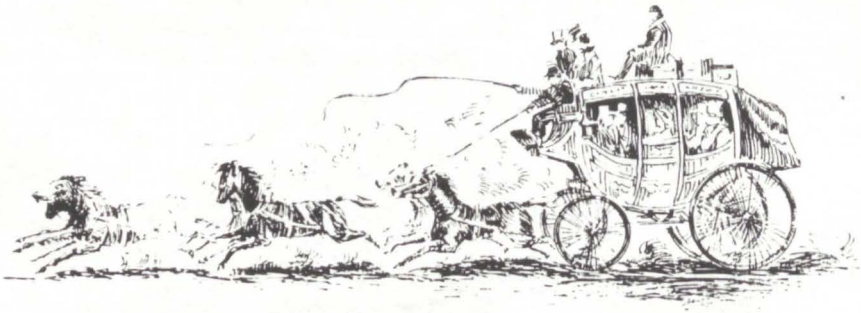
Fort Dearborn

When the girls grew older, they were sent to Detroit and to Canada for instruction in religion and manners. When they came home for vacations, they were popular. They often went to Fort Dearborn to parties and probably had many parties at the homestead.

The Changing Years

When the Baillys had lived in the homestead for several years, a mail route was established from Detroit to Fort Dearborn. A buckboard went by once a week through their front lawn on the Indian trail, then over to the beach and around the lake to Fort Dearborn. Later, a stagecoach went by three times a week. This was too much traffic for Joseph Bailly. He had the road moved from his front lawn to behind his house. He built an inn on the new road for the travelers. There was not enough room in the homestead for so many people.

The new road turned north after it passed the Bailly trading post and joined the Detroit road at the beach. The trail had been good for moccasined feet and for horseback riding, but it was not good for wheels. This part of the trip from Detroit to Fort Dearborn was often the hardest for the horses and passengers. The horses struggled through the soft sand; the wheels sank to the hubcaps. Many times the passengers had to get out of the stagecoach to help push it through the sand. In the winter the ice was piled up on the shore so the horses could not be watered until they reached the Calumet River, just ten miles from Fort Dearborn. The fifty-mile trip from what is now Michigan City to Chicago took six days.



When the stagecoach line started, settlers began to come in great numbers. Farmers, teachers and mechanics bought land to start a new life on this frontier. It was the end of the fur business for Joseph Bailly. Animals were killed or moved away. The Indians began to leave, too.

Of all the settlers who came, Joseph liked Farmer Jesse Morgan best. Jesse Morgan and his family were kind to the Indians. They were fair to them and treated them like friends. The Indians liked the Morgans, too. The Morgans were kind to new settlers who came without money or provisions. The Morgan farm was always open to strangers.

One time the Baillys avoided serious trouble in the dunes. A group of Ottawas came to camp in the oak grove in front of the homestead. When they were settled, an Ottawa mother sent her two girls to a neighboring farm to buy potatoes. The girls walked the three miles to the farm, then went out to the field to ask the farm boys to sell them

the potatoes. The boys made fun of the girls and said unkind things to them. The girls became very frightened; they turned and ran as fast as they could go with the boys right behind them. The girls got as far as the homestead, then collapsed on the steps of the porch. Marie saw what had happened. Although they meant no harm, she knew the boys would be in serious trouble when the Indians found out what they had done to the girls. She sent the boys home to hide.

Marie was frightened. She sent her youngest girl to the camp with the Indian girls. Her child was to listen to the adults. She was to come home if she heard any plans against the boys.

When the Indians heard what had happened, they were furious. The leaders demanded revenge. They plotted to kill every white man, woman and child in the area except the Baillys and Morgans.

When the Bailly child told this to her mother, Marie and Joseph went over to the Indian camp. For three days and nights they talked. The Indians finally calmed down and Marie thought it was safe to go home and get some rest.

The calm did not last long. Before she had a chance to lie down, the little girl was back to tell Marie the Indians had started to do war dances as the braves were sharpening knives and tomahawks and the women and children were making bullets. Marie and Joseph hurried back to the camp. Joseph talked to the men. She said the

prayers of the Catholic church for them. She told them what would happen to them if they killed white people.

This time she and Joseph had success. The Indians decided to break camp at dawn and go back to Michigan. Joseph helped them pack and went with them to their canoes. He took the chief in his boat, went a day's journey with him up the lake. He told the chief how wise he was to leave without causing any trouble. He assured the chief that Jesse Morgan would take care of the boys.

Finally Joseph thought it was safe to leave the Indians. He pulled his boat to shore and lay down on the bank; it was his first rest for a week. He and Marie had saved the lives of many settlers.

With the settlers came new developments, towns, roads, railroads, canals. It was natural to use Indian trails for roads. The settlers knew the Indians had found the quickest and easiest routes. There were hidden marshes and

quicksand in much of the area. The Indians had found ways around these danger spots. Even now, parts of Road 12 and the South Shore Railroad are built on Indian trails.

Joseph Bailly purchased more land near his home and laid out a town. He named the town after himself and the streets after members of his family. He thought this would be a fast-growing town because so many settlers were coming. Also, it was the main route to Fort Dearborn. But many of the settlers were farmers. They could not farm the dunes and marshes. They settled farther south where the soil was good for their crops. Only a few lots were sold in Joseph Bailly's town.

He was interested in other projects. He was part owner of the steamboat "Michigan," a fine Great Lakes boat. He wanted to build a harbor on the lake. Part of the land he purchased was to control the Calumet River and have an accessible route from his trading post to the harbor (Marquette Park, Gary).

Even though he was interested in his projects, Joseph Bailly considered moving his post to Baton Rouge, Missouri. His business was poor because the animals were gone. The Indians no longer lived in the dunes, so he could not do his missionary work. The settlers were crowding the area. He discussed the move with his wife but she decided to stay at the homestead. Her children were growing and needed a good education. They were closer to schools here; it was better to stay where they were.

As Hortense, the Indian child, grew up, she became sickly. She had terrible fits and caused dissension in the household. She accused others of falsehoods and was delirious much of the time. Often she had to be sent to Detroit for medical help.

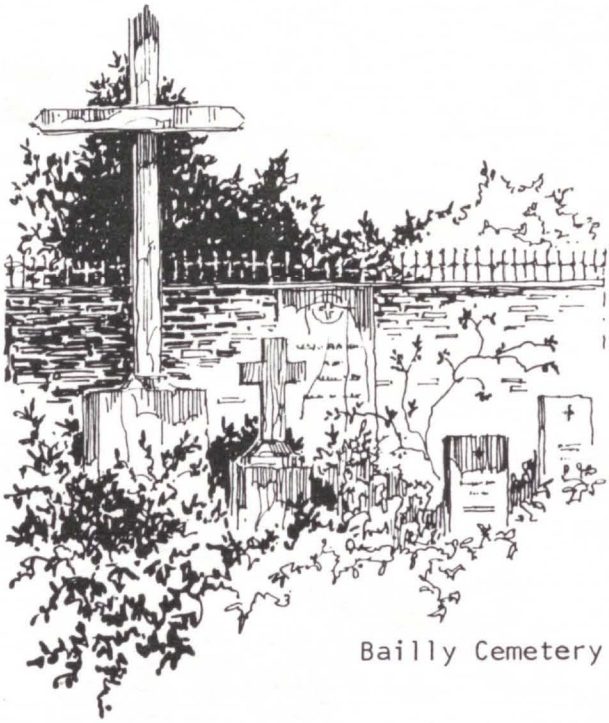
When he finally learned what had happened so many years before at the birth of his first son, Joseph Bailly went back to the Ottawa village, found where his son was buried and moved the casket to the little cemetery behind the homestead.

Soon after this heartbreaking experience, he caught a cold and fever. For eighteen months he lay in bed. He asked to be moved from the homestead to the kitchen building at the back of the house. This pleasant two-story cottage was ideal for a sick man. It had a large cooking stove and a warm fireplace. It was bright and cheerful. There he lay in bed, reading, closing

out his accounts and making arrangements for his family when he would be gone. His wife, Marie, was always at his side.

In 1835, the first white settler in the dunes died. Joseph Aubert de Gaspe Bailly de Messein. His name is still here. Bailly station is a stop for the South Shore train. Bailly Generating Plant and Bethlehem Steel are built on what was once his land. Bailly School in Chesterton is named after him. The Bailly Homestead is in the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore.

A friend of the Indians, a friend of the new settlers. The first white man to live in the Indiana Dunes. Joseph Bailly.



Bailly Cemetery

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INDIANA COLLECTION

Bailey Homestead

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